



CAREER MATURITY AND CAREER DECISION-MAKING - A REVIEW

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Career Maturity

The construct of career maturity or vocational maturity as he called it, was introduced by Super (1957). He claimed that career maturity represented "the place reached on the continuum of vocational development from exploration to decline" (Super, 1957, p.186). He also gave birth to the "vocational maturity quotient" which was defined as the ratio of vocational to chronological age. His operationalization of career maturity was implemented and made commercially available in the Career Development Inventory (CDI) (Super, Thompson, Lindeman, Jordaan & Myers, 1981). The inventory was designed to tap the first four dimensions in his model, and is divided into two parts: Part one includes four scales which measure Career Planning, Career Exploration, Career Decision Making, and World-of-Work Information. Part two is comprised of a scale measuring Knowledge of Preferred Occupational Group. Crites (1965) theorized that career maturity consists of two major dimensions: career choice content and career choice process. In 1978 he published his Career Maturity Inventory (CMI) (Crites, 1978). The CMI consists of two parts, a set of competence tests and a set of attitudinal scales. The competence tests assess a person's knowledge of his or her resources, occupational knowledge, the person's ability to match personal resources to attributes of the job, and planning ability. The attitudinal scales measure decisiveness in career decision making, involvement in career decision making, independence in career decision making, orientation to career decision making, and compromise in career decision making. It should be mentioned that both these conceptualizations of career maturity are based on the assumption that career readiness is related to one's stage in vocational development. Recent attempts at defining career maturity have left this assumption, because age is not strongly correlated with indices of career maturity (Patton & Creed, 2001). Additionally, both of these inventories have criticized for being too undifferentiated.

The Career Decision Scale (CDS) (Osipow, Carney & Barak, 1976) is representative of this new way of defining career maturity. CDS pretends to tap four dimensions of career maturity: indecision, decidedness, approach-approach conflict, and barriers. The Career Factors Inventory (CFI) (Chartrand, Robbins, Morrill & Boggs, 1990) measures four dimensions that might promote or impede upon successful career decision making: career choice anxiety, generalised indecisiveness, need for career information, and need for self-knowledge. The final inventory belonging to this category is the Career Decision-Making

Difficulties Questionnaire (CDDQ) (Gati, Krausz & Osipow, 1996; Osipow, 1999). The CDDQ is based on the authors' theoretical hierarchical taxonomy of decision making difficulties. They distinguish between difficulties experienced prior to the decision making process, and those that are encountered during the decision making process. There are potentially five kinds of difficulties which can be encountered prior to the process and seven during the process. Unfortunately, Albion & Fogarty (2002) found that a model consisting of five factors provided the best fit to the data. The five factors are as follows: Lack of motivation, indecisiveness, lack of information, internal conflicts, and conflict with others. This short synopsis of existing measures of career maturity reveals a rather bewildering array of dimensions that might possibly hinder or promote successful career decision making. Several attempts have been made to reduce this diversity of dimensions, primarily through exploratory factor analysis of existing measures (Dickinson & Tokar, 2004; Fucqua & Newman, 1989; Kelly & Lee, 2002; Stead & Watson, 1993; Tinsley, Bowman & York, 1989). The consensus emerging from these analysis appears to be that a need for information factor, in particular need for world of work information, should be included in the conceptualization of career maturity. Career choice indecisiveness or career choice anxiety emerges as a second common theme in the existing measures. Trait indecisiveness, or actually self-esteem, given the content of the items tapping this dimension, is a good third candidate.

Finally, choice inhibitors, which really is lack of parental or familial support for career plans, is a final common theme. Neither of the existing measures have chosen to include constructs that measure attitudes towards education and learning, or attitudes towards work. This is unfortunate because both of these have potential implications for the career development of the kids. Attitudes towards education can function as a proxy for dropout, it says something about the extent to which the school has fulfilled its objectives, and which career options are avail-

able to the student in question. Attitudes towards work have potentially even more severe career implications. Adolescents with negative attitudes toward work will in all likelihood not engage in career exploration activities, such attitudes might also reveal that the student in question has more profound personal problems.

However, it must be said that there exists several methodological shortcomings associated with the structural analysis of measures of career maturity. The work on CDS and CDDQ has relied exclusively on exploratory data analytic strategies; exploratory factor analysis and cluster analysis, the shortcomings of which are familiar. Chartrand et al (1990) and Simon & Tovar (2004) applied covariance structure analysis to the CFI, and found support for a four factor solution, but gender differences were not explored. Dickinson & Tokar (2004) proclaimed that the factor covariances of the CFI were invariant across men and women, but no proper test of invariance was presented. It is also disappointing that the sample sizes are so small, which might undermine the stability of the results. Additionally, most of the research has been conducted on college students, which may not be appropriate for the present research with its focus on junior high and high school students.

Given the centrality of the construct of career maturity, one might expect that a substantial amount of research had been performed to elucidate its nomological net; that is, exploring the antecedents and consequences of career maturity. Unfortunately, this is not so. Hartung (1997) reports some minor correlations between the various CDI scales and vocational interests, and Savickas and Hartung (1996) find some small correlations between intelligence and CDI. Albion & Fogarty (2002) found that Neuroticism was positively correlated with the CDDQ Indecisiveness and Lack of motivation scales, whereas Conscientiousness was negatively correlated with the same scales. These are potentially interesting findings since they point to important antecedents of aspects of career maturity.

One study sought to ascertain the long term consequences of career immaturity. Savickas & Hartung (1996) found that the CDI was able to identify students which would encounter academic difficulties two years into medical school. But by and large, no systematic and high quality research efforts have been put into the investigation of the antecedents and consequences of career maturity.

Career Decision Making

Research indicates that career decision-making among students in contemporary society has not been well understood (Dzuiban, Tango & Hynes, 1994). There have been certain factors that have been identified as contributing to career decision-making among young people.

Baumgardner (1982) describes disillusionment in career decision making processes among students as being high and attribute this to situations where students and academia are caught up in a dilemma brought about by changes in the working world and changing economic trends. These changes contribute to students evaluating their college education in terms of the market value often leading to students making unrealistic and idealized career plans (Baumgardner 1982).

According to Donahue (2006), include engaging in making a choice and knowing that one needs to make a decision and narrowing a list of possible options; deciding on a study plan or occupation; acting on or implementing the plan; and finally, reflecting on decisions made and knowing that one has made a good choice. Similar tools that may assist young people in making successful and appropriate career decisions. These tools consist of identifying needs; evaluating life roles; identifying interests; identifying other relevant factors relating to personal or socio-cultural factors, for example; evaluating career maturity; evaluating decision-making ability; obtaining career information; integrating self information with career information; making a career choice and finally planning one

According to Harren decision-making theory (as cited in Bimrose & Barnes, 2007) which was developed from career decisions made by college students,

there are three career decision-making styles:

- (1) The rational style where individuals adopt a logical and systematic approach to decisions
- (2) The intuitive approach where there is more reliance on internal affective states in decision making processes
- (3) The dependent style where decisions are contingent upon the reactions of friends, family, and peers.

Barriers to career decision-making

Research has identified certain barriers that are common in the career decision making process among students. Some of the barriers identified include, interests, values and abilities which are perceived as important personal factors in career decision making; direct and vicarious work experience which influenced expected career choice of students (Lent, Singley, Sheu, Schmidt & Schmidt, 2007). As a result of these barriers, there is need for support in practices of exposing students to career exploration activities that would enable them to clarify their interests, values and abilities in relation to the occupation field of their choice. Financial concerns, negative social family influences, role conflicts, personal adjustment difficulties and ability limitations, impend are seen as negative influences on career decision making processes (Hoffmann, Jackson & Smith, 2005). Factors that were identified as support factors in research conducted by Lent, Brown, Talleyrand, McPartland, Davis, Chopra,

Alexander, Suthakaran & Chai (2002) included; social support and encouragement from friends, family and teachers; role models or mentors and financial resources; personal strengths such as self confidence and perseverance and goal setting.

Creed, Patton and Bartrum (2004) have identified certain internal and external factors as acting as barriers to career decision-making. According to Mau (2004) internal conflicts such as lack of confidence, low motivation, and external factors such as lack of access to education and poverty may affect decision-making. Moreover, ethnic and gender discrimination, financial problems, family attitudes, perceived lack of ability and lack of educational opportunities have also been cited as acting as barriers to career decision-making (Punch, Creed & Hyde, 2006). According to Harren (as cited in Julien, 1999) barriers occur when people do not know what information is needed, where to find relevant information, when there is a lack of awareness of sources of information, when sources of information needed are non-existent, when there is a lack of communication skills, self confidence or ability, discouragement by sources approached for information, delays encountered in information seeking, and inaccurate or inappropriate information received and information scatter.

According to Morgan and Ness (2003) factors that might also contribute to barriers in career decision-making include career indecision. Career indecision includes:

Lack of readiness. Factors that contribute to lack of readiness include lack of motivation to begin the process of decision making. General indecisiveness that permeates all types of decision making and beliefs in dysfunctional career decision making myths, for example, that career decisions are best made by experts are also some of the factors that illustrate lack of readiness.

Lack of information and inconsistent information. Factors in this domain include lack of information about what entails career decision making process (for example not knowing how to optimally make career decisions). Poor self capabilities, interests or personal traits serve as some of the issues relating to lack of what information. Included in this category is limited information about occupations and is involved in these occupations as well as various options that are available; and finally, lack of information about the ways in which one can get career information.

Inconsistent information often influences career indecision. This inconsistency is often due to unreliable information that students have. Inconsistency is also influenced by internal conflicts or difficulties that the individuals might have (for example, relating to evolving personal identity) and external conflicts which might involve significant others.

In order to combat some of the barriers mentioned above certain coping mechanisms have been identified as being helpful in career decision-making. Coping mechanisms that were identified by Lent et al. (2002) in the career decision making process included direct problem focused coping and social support seeking; financial strategies for example soliciting loans; cognitive restructuring (acknowledging that everyone is different and have different abilities) and cognitive reframing (using ones family situation as a motivation to work harder).

Choosing a career and facilitating career development remains dynamic as life-long learning, expanding lifestyle options and the changing workplace presents new opportunities. There are a number of theoretical voices directing the career development journey.

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